

AN ²
ENQUIRY
INTO THE
DESIGN
OF THE
CHRISTIAN SABBATH,

AND THE
MANNER IN WHICH IT SHOULD BE
OBSERVED, TO ANSWER ITS
IMPORTANT END.

L O N D O N :

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M DCC LXXIX.



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A Full conviction of the great importance of the institution which is the subject of these pages ; a deep concern to see it so neglected and perverted as it is ; and an earnest desire to be instrumental in the smallest degree to the conviction and persuasion of others, is all I have to offer in my excuse, when I undertake a task which I am so little able to go through, with justice to the subject, or advantage to the reader.

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I am, however, not without some hope, that amongst the many who squander away the valuable advantages which the Sabbath gives them, there are some who may be benefited by the admonition, if not by the information, I would give them. It may be of some advantage to them to be reminded, that the Sabbath was not intended for their indulgence, but for more important uses: that if it be not applied to those uses, the consequences must be very prejudicial to themselves: that the opportunities of improvement which it affords, are so beneficial and so necessary, that they cannot lose them without losing advantages of the utmost consequence.

With this view we will therefore enquire, What the design of the institution was—How it should be observed to answer this design—and whether the religious employment of the leisure it affords us be not so conducive, and in many respects so necessary

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to our spiritual improvement, that it must have been our interest, and our duty, to make this use of it, though its design had not been what it is.

In the first part of our enquiry, we must go back to the Jewish Sabbath; because, though the day and appellation of it have been changed, in remembrance of that great event which makes so principal a part of the Christian faith, the resurrection of Christ, yet, with respect to the chief design, it appears to have the same object still in view: so that by finding out what that was designed for, we shall come at the design of ours.

Now the Sabbath, as it was given to the Jews, appears to have been instituted, —
First, — for their ease and refreshment.

Rest is so expressly and particularly mentioned in every place where the institution is spoken of, that it would be contradicting

the plainest assertions of scripture not to acknowledge that this was some part of its design.

It is every where strictly commanded, that no work be done on this day : that it be a day of rest to the master, to the servant, and to the cattle *. And in one or two places their refreshment is mentioned as the reason of their resting. “ Six days thou shalt
 “ do thy work, and on the seventh day
 “ thou shalt rest, that thine ox and thine
 “ ass may rest, and the son of thy hand-
 “ maid, and the stranger may be refreshed †.”
 ——— “ that thy man-servant and thy maid-
 “ servant may rest as well as thou ‡.”

At first sight this may seem perhaps to have been the chief, if not the only purpose of the

* Exod. xvi. 23.—cap. xx. 10.—cap. xxiii. 12.
 —cap. xxxi. 14.—cap. xxxiv. 21.—cap. xxxv. 2.
 —Deut. v. 14, &c.

† Exod. xxiii. 12.

‡ Deut. v. 14.

Sabbath : but a little attention will convince us, that mere bodily rest was, however, the smallest part of the design, if any otherwise a part, than as it was necessary to other ends which it had in view.

Merely as a day of ease and indulgence it could not be intended. Life is too short, and the business of life too important, to allow so large a part of our time to be trifled away in so unprofitable a manner. Half of our time is already lost in sleep and other refreshments which nature stands in daily need of ; much of the short remainder is very unprofitably spent ; and surely God could never have intended so much more to be added to the large account of useless time.

If our views extended no farther than the present life, then indeed he might have given us one day in seven for our indulgence. But when our existence here is nothing more than a preparatory one ; when it is not

in this life, but in the life to come, that we are to look for happiness; when our great business here is to prepare and qualify ourselves for that eternal state which follows; it seems not likely that God would suffer so considerable a part of our time to be so unprofitably employed. So much of it being already necessarily spent in offices which can no otherwise promote the great end of our existence, than as they contribute to our mere support; it is rather to be supposed, that he would direct every vacant moment, all that could possibly be spared from the necessary employments of life, to be devoted to the higher purposes for which we were created.

But it would not be only a waste of time; it would be the most effectual means to lead us into sin, if this were what the Sabbath was designed for. The idleness of this day would expose us to more, and greater temptations, than all the employments of the other six.

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Mere inactivity would be no pleasure to us. Man is of a too active nature to be unemployed. He will be doing something. If he has no business to employ his time, he will have recourse to pleasures to fill it up. And if on other days, when he has something to employ him and check the ardour of his lusts, he is so little able to confine himself to pleasures, or degrees of pleasure, that are innocent and safe; if he then indulges too freely in such as are in themselves or their excesses sinful, what would be the case on a day entirely devoted to pleasure; when there would be no business to divert his lusts, and so many idle hours to pass away?

We may see the consequences by observing those who think this to have been the chief or only purpose of the Sabbath. See how they spend it, and we see how men in general would have spent it, if they had understood it to be intended for a day of rest.

This, it may be said, is only the abuse which men of bad dispositions may make of the indulgence. Though God hath, in kindness to his creatures, permitted them to rest from their labours, and indulge in innocent recreations, he hath, in this, as in other cases, given them the command of their lusts, and enabled them to avoid forbidden ones.

But though we have, as no doubt we have, or might have, strength sufficient, if it were intended that we should be exposed to such a trial; though by a constant and strenuous exertion of our strength we might be able to restrain our inclinations, and withstand the forbidden pleasures that we should have to tempt us; yet it would be a hard, and, if one might presume to judge of its utility, an unnecessary trial: we should however think it a very inconsistent one with the design of the institution, if recreation were its object.

While

While we are engaged in the business of our respective stations, our minds are employed ; we have no heavy hours upon our hands ; no need to go in search of pleasures to kill the tedious time ; we are therefore not exposed to those temptations which are always ready to seduce us in our idle moments. The temptations that we are exposed to we may withstand ; and it is necessary we should be able to withstand them : they are such as we must meet with in the high, direct road through life. But to keep the mind in a constant state of exertion, at a time when we should have nothing to employ it ; when we should have so many idle hours upon our hands, and these given us, as we would suppose, for the very purpose of indulgence ; this would be a hard — a painful trial. In the choice of our amusements, we should find it difficult to confine ourselves to such as are not sinful in themselves, or have not a tendency to lead us into sin. Though we might choose such as we should think innocent,

cent, and which in themselves should be so, yet, it would be very difficult to avoid excess; and, however innocent in their nature, that excess would make them sinful. Sensual pleasures must be sparingly used, or, however innocent we may think them, their effects will be pernicious. They will enervate the mind, draw down the affections from things above, and render our dispositions, already too little inclined to virtue, still less inclined than they are.

But it would not be only in the excess of innocent indulgencies that we should be exposed to danger. We should be liable, and, without a very watchful care, and strong exertion of our minds, should be drawn into many very sinful ones. It is easy to conceive, that if it were not for the restraints of human laws, and of customs which fashion hath not yet been able to break through, they who now indulge in sinful pleasures on this day would indulge more freely than they do; and
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if it were not for these restraints, by which many temptations are taken out of their way, and for the influence which the religious exercises of the day have upon them, by which they become better able to withstand temptation, they who now stop at innocent ones would go much farther than they do.

Hard and difficult would be the task, though it should be practicable, to keep free from the dangers to which we should be exposed. And to what purpose would it be? Why should we be sent out of the high road of life, in which there seem to be temptations enough to try our virtue, and exposed to others, which we should no where meet with, if we were not to go out of our way to find them? The long tedious interval of idle time on this day must give rise to many temptations, which we should else have no occasion to withstand, and which therefore it does not seem necessary that we should be able to withstand.

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If in the choice or degree of our indulgencies, it were intended that our reason and our virtue should be exercised; or if such an exertion of reason and virtue would be necessary, to avoid the degrees or kinds of amusement that would be sinful, let those who contend for the Sabbath as a day of pleasure say how they would like it upon such terms—whether they would think it an indulgence, to be exposed to so much danger, and to be obliged to exert so much caution and resolution in restraining appetites that have nothing to divert them, and temptations so many to seduce them.

These considerations would be sufficient to convince us that it was not intended for indulgence. But other, and more material purposes will now appear; and these will shew us how small a part of its design the mere rest of the body was, if any otherwise a part than as it was necessary to the further purposes which it had in view. So much
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stresses will appear to have been laid on this, because without it the ends for which it was designed could not have been effected.

But it may be admitted, without at all interfering with the other purposes of the Sabbath, that this was some small part of its design. As this would be effected without obstructing the more important purposes which it had in view, God might have intended the ease of his creatures in this respect, while he promoted their advantage in another. However that be, it is certain there were further purposes in his design.

“ Verily, says he, my Sabbaths ye shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you *.”

“ The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout

* Exod. xxxi. 13.

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their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever : for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed *."

" I gave them my Sabbaths to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them †."

" Hallow my Sabbaths, and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God ‡."

" Every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant || ."

It was to be a sign or memorial of the creation of the world.

* Exod. xxxi. 16, 17.

† Ezek. xx. 12.

‡ — ver. 20.

|| Isaiah, lvi. 6.

The cessation of all their labours one day in seven had so plain an allusion to God's finishing the works of creation in six days, and resting on the seventh, that they could never forget this great truth so long as they should continue to observe the Sabbath. Every return of this day would bring back their creator to their minds. And thus this great principle of their own religion would be preserved, and a contempt and abhorrence of those of other nations around them would be kept up. If at any time they should be inclined to worship other gods, the Sabbath, the recollection of that great truth to which the Sabbath led them, would at once reproach and stop them, and lead them back to the one true God by whom the world was created.

A sign or memorial too it was of their deliverance from their oppressive servitude in Egypt. "Remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy

thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day *."

Not that this was the reason of the institution. One day in seven was set apart as a memorial of the creation; but though instituted with this design, the rest it ordained, being a fit occasion, and means to preserve the remembrance of that slavery and oppression from which they had been delivered, it was also to be commemorative of this. A very fit occasion it was, if this were the day, as it hath been remarked to be †, on which Pharaoh and his army perished in pursuit of them. It, however, very aptly reminded them of their great deliverer who had given them this rest; which, contrasted with their former slavery, must have impressed upon

* Deut. v. 15.

† Vid. Patrick's Comment. upon Exod. xiv. 30. and Deut. v. 15.

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their minds a very lively sense of what God had done for them; and thus perpetuated the remembrance of him, both as the Creator of the world, and the Redeemer of Israel.

As a sign, it also figuratively represented the Sabbath of a future life. It was a symbol of this; reminding them of this eternal rest from all their labours—that as after six days of labour and fatigue, the seventh was a day of ease; so after a life of toil and care, labour and fatigue, a state would follow of everlasting rest and refreshment*.

Another respect in which the Sabbath was a sign, was, as an additional token of the covenant between God and them, and a

* Vid. Hebrews iv. and Whitby's note upon the 8th and 9th verses, where the opinion of the Jews and of the ancient Christians too, respecting this part of the design, will be seen.

badge of distinction between them and others. By observing the Sabbath, they professed themselves his worshippers : it was a kind of covenant between them that he was their God, and they his people. “ The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations for a perpetual covenant *.”

And by so peculiar a practice as this was, they were effectually distinguished from all other nations, whatever the purpose of distinction were : whether to increase that dissimilarity of manners that was intended to be preserved between them and others ; or only to shew what God they worshipped, to distinguish them from the worshippers of other gods, or to teach these, that the gods they worshipped were only creatures of the true God, or nothing more than idols, the work of mens hands.

* Exod. xxxi. 16.

Here then are further purposes, for which the Sabbath was designed : — But there were further purposes than these in view.

When Moses first speaks of it, in the history of the creation, he says, “ God blessed the seventh day, and *sanctified* it *.” And when the rulers of the congregation came to tell him that the people had gathered a double quantity of manna on the sixth day, “ This is that which the Lord hath said, To-morrow is the rest of the *Holy* Sabbath †.”

And in the words of the institution it is commanded to be kept *holy*, and is called an *holy day*. “ Remember the Sabbath day to keep it *holy* ‡.” — “ The Lord *blessed* the Sabbath day and *hallowed* it §.” “ Ye shall keep the Sabbath, for it is *holy* unto you. ¶” — “ The seventh (day) is the Sabbath of rest, *holy to the Lord* §.” “ Six days shall work

* Gen. ii. 3.

† Exod. xx. 8.

‡ Exod. xxxi. 14.

† Exod. xvi. 23.

§ Exod. xx. 11.

§ Exod. xxxi. 15.

be done, but on the seventh day there [shall] be to you an *holy day*, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord *." And "keep the Sabbath day to *sanctify* it †."

Here we see its great design. Pious and holy uses are what it evidently was designed for.

Should it be thought that these expressions are not, in themselves, a designation of it to such uses; that sanctifying might mean nothing more than separating or setting it apart from common use; nothing more than the consecration of it as a day of rest; yet there are other expressions and circumstances which determine these to be the uses for which it was to be set apart.

"Speak unto the children of Israel," said God to Moses, "and say unto them, con-

* Exod. xxxv. 2.

† Deut. v. 12.

cerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be *holy convocations*, even these are my feasts *," which are the *Sabbath*, &c.

"Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, *an holy convocation* †;" a day of public assembly for holy purposes. If the words which are here translated *holy convocations* should not be thought to mean days of public assembly, feasts (in the original has been observed ‡ to mean as much. Feasts, in the common acceptation of the word, it could not mean; for one of the days which are comprehended under the general name of feasts, so far from being a day of festivity, was a solemn fast. This, as the others, was strictly commanded to be observed as a day of rest; but it was not to be consumed in idleness or pleasure—it was to be a day of affliction—they

* Levit. xxiii. 2.

† — ver. 3.

‡ Vid. Patrick, Comm. upon Levit. xxiii. 2.

were to afflict their souls, and offer an offering of fire unto the Lord. Whatsoever soul should not be afflicted that day was to be cut off from among his people *.

And as this was one of those feasts ; one of the days which were to be proclaimed holy convocations ; and was as strictly as any commanded to be observed as a day of rest, and yet the professed design of it was a religious one ; so the Sabbath, which was called a feast, a holy convocation, a Sabbath of rest, was likewise designed for religious uses. As the rest of the one was plainly required for no other purpose than that it might enable them the more uninterruptedly to devote their minds to serious reflection, so the rest of the other was appointed, that they might not have any thing to hinder or draw away their minds from the religious exercises in which they were to be engaged.

* Levit. xxiii. ver. 27, 29.

And it may be here remarked, as a confirmation that it was to be devoted to such uses, that there was an extraordinary sacrifice appointed for the Sabbath, in addition to the common daily ones *. And that that part of the temple where the people were to worship, and which was to be kept shut on other days, was to be opened on this; and on this they were expressly directed to worship there before the Lord.—“The gate of the inner court that looketh toward the East shall be shut the six working days; but on the Sabbath it shall be opened, and in the day of the new moon it shall be opened. And the Prince shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate without. — Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before the Lord in the Sabbaths, and in the new moons †.”

* Numbers, xxviii. 9.

† Ezek. xlvi. 1, 2, 3.

One passage more from scripture will be sufficient to shew that the Sabbath was to be set apart, not for indulgence, but for religious uses.

“ If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father *.”

The reasons too for which the day was sanctified, pointed to these as the uses for which it was designed. It was to be a day of rest, in remembrance of God's having created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh. Here were subjects for them to

* Isaiah, lviii. 13, 14.

contemplate — the works of creation. As a bare unmeaning memorial, it would have been of little use. It would have been to little purpose to observe the day, unless it had recalled the reason of its observance; which led, and seems to have been designed to lead, their thoughts to him, whose power and wisdom, and goodness, are conspicuous in all his works.

As the rest which it enjoined after the cares and labours of the preceding week prefigured their eternal rest, this also suggested a subject for their meditations.

And their wonderful deliverance out of Egypt was another to which it plainly pointed for their recollection; that they might revolve it in their minds, and be led to venerate and adore the Being whose providence had so signally preserved them in time past, and on whom they were to depend for future favour and support. His providence could not but be the subject of their reflections

tions on a day commemorative of such a signal instance of it.

These were subjects and employments which the reasons of the institution pointed out ; as, when the day was changed from the seventh to the first, the resurrection of Christ, the object of which it was then commemorative, and the reason of the change, was suggested to Christians as a subject for the employment of their minds. As this great and leading article of our religion is now, so those great and fundamental ones of theirs were then, subjects which the Sabbath led them to employ their time upon, as in itself a religious exercise, and leading to others in which a religious and holy day should be employed.

And as a sign or memorial of those objects ; as a sign or token of the covenant between God and them ; as a sign of distinction between them and other nations ;

tions ; what could better answer these purposes than to spend the day in pious and holy exercises ? The observance of it as a day of rest would indeed have been a memorial of the creation, and of the redemption of Israel ; a profession of their faith ; a symbol, in some respects, of their eternal rest ; and a sign to distinguish them from the rest of mankind : but the best memorial ; the best profession of their belief ; the best and most expressive symbol of an eternal Sabbath ; the sign that would best distinguish them to the honour of their creator, and every other probable purpose of distinction, was, to devote the day to pious and holy exercises ; exercises suitable to every such purpose, and such as would in themselves and in their effects distinguish them in a manner becoming the purity and holiness of the Being whom they worshipped : distinguish them as the worshippers of a pure and holy God ; the holy one of Israel.

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The strict commands for its observance as a day of rest, and the severe denunciations against the profaners of it, may perhaps afford another proof of this design. If something more than their refreshment had not been the object of the institution, these would have been unnecessary. Other reasons indeed occur, why so much stress was laid on rest. It was by a strict cessation of their labours that the other purposes that have been mentioned were to be effected. Without this, it would have been no memorial of God's resting on the seventh day from the work of creation; no apt memorial of their redemption from slavery in Egypt; no expressive figure of their heavenly rest; nor would it have been that distinguishing mark that it was intended to be. By not strictly resting, they therefore defeated its design as a memorial; they broke their covenant with God; they no longer professed themselves his worshippers; no longer were distinguished as his peculiar people; no longer held

held forth to the world the true God in the character of its creator. Fit therefore, on these accounts, it was that they should be laid under the strictest prohibitions, and threatened with the severest penalties. But might not these have been intended also to lead them to the religious employment of the day? Restrained from every employment that could promote their temporal advantage, would they not be led to seek for other purposes, for which so strict a prohibition could be designed? and what reason so obvious, or so adequate to such severe restrictions, could they find as this, that the day was designed for religious uses; with which their temporal employments were inconsistent.

The necessity of such an intermission of their labours for religious purposes, is another proof that must have convinced them what the Sabbath was designed for.

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If there were any other time that they could so conveniently have met together for the purpose of public worship, how little they would have been disposed to do it, and how little of their time they would have been disposed to spend in any other religious manner, if there had not been a day like this set apart on purpose for it ; we may pretty nearly judge from the present dispositions and practices of the world.

Notwithstanding the impressions which the religious exercises of the Sabbath leave upon the mind, we are now but little inclined to make this use of any other part of our time. The sight of a religious book ; the mention of a religious subject ; the intrusion of a religious thought, on any other day than this, casts a damp upon our spirits, and overspreads us with gloom and melancholy. We may judge then what the case would be ; how little we should ever be disposed for such subjects,

subjects, and such employments, if there were not a time set apart on purpose for them.

Our present indisposition, it may perhaps be thought, is owing to our having a day set apart for such uses : for we are very ready to avail ourselves of this as an excuse for our not attending to these matters at other times, however forgetful we may be, when the Sabbath comes, to apply it to these uses.

But it is difficult to conceive how we should be less indisposed at other times than we are at present if there were not a day appropriated to such uses. For some good impressions, some advantages, we, no doubt, receive from the religious exercises of this day ; and these, one should suppose, would rather lessen than increase our aversions—would make us more sensible of our spiritual interest, and more ready to attend to it.

If

If we only hear a sermon every Sunday, it must impress our minds with some sense of a future state, and lessen our attachments to the present: and, with these advantages, if we are so little inclined to any spiritual employment on other days, we should surely not be more so, if we had not these to influence our dispositions.

Besides, it is with difficulty that we bring ourselves to employ even this day in such a manner, when all business is at a stand, and we have nothing to interrupt—nothing to indispose us; judge then what the case would be at other times, when we should have business to hinder and indispose us, and pleasures to invite and draw us from our religious exercises—when we could employ our time to more immediate advantage, or spend it in more agreeable amusements.

But to convince us what the case would be, we need only observe what their dispositions are, and what their conduct is, who do
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not consider the Sabbath as a religious day, and therefore do not employ it in a religious manner. How are they disposed at other times? Do they devote any part of any other day to their spiritual affairs? God forbid that we should judge uncharitably of them! but there is little reason to think they do.—They find, they will confess they do, their present interests too predominant. Indeed, the interests and pleasures of the present life, while we are so busily engaged in their pursuit as we are on other days, take such full possession of the mind, that it is not an easy matter to disengage it: it requires great resolution and command of temper to forego them for the distant interests of a future state. Besides if we were disposed, we should not be fit for such employments. Our minds would be so clogged with the cares of business, that matters of a spiritual nature would make no impression on us. Or, if we should receive some good impressions, they would be soon effaced. The busy scenes to which we should

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return would stifle every serious thought and virtuous purpose before it could have effect.

It is easy to see, even with respect to those who are masters of their time, and have capacities and opportunities to know their duty without the help of public instruction, how necessary it is that there should be times set apart from the common affairs of life for religious uses. But it will appear still more necessary that it should be so, if we have respect to those in servile stations, or of inferior abilities.

The laborious part of the world have very little time to spare from their daily labours. Every day brings with it full employment for all their time. When the labours of one day are over, they are glad to go to rest to refresh and fit themselves for the labours of the next. They have not time, and if they had time they are not fit for exercises of the mind. What opportunity then would they have for religious

religious purposes, if there were not some such provision as this to give them a respite from their labours? And what would their condition be without it?

Bad enough the world now is, but it shocks one to think what it would be, if we were not sometimes called off from the engagements of this world, and reminded of the interests of the next; if we were not sometimes told our duty, and the dangerous consequences of transgressing it.

Great as our advantages are in other respects—clear as our discoveries of a future state and all its interesting circumstances are, we should but little excel the more unenlightened ages of the world, in the knowledge or the practice of our duty, if we had not also the advantage of them in this respect; if we had not the opportunity which the Sabbath gives us, to derive our knowledge, and improve our dispositions. Religion is now too little

the subject of our thoughts, but it would then be seldom or never thought of. We should then have nothing to remind us of it. Some, indeed, of a serious turn of mind, might make it their study and their practice, but these would be too few to have any influence, by admonition or example, upon the great bulk of mankind.

Some too, there might be, whom sickness, calamities, the loss of friends, or other alarming incidents would awaken from their thoughtless state; but these too would be few, and their impressions too slight to have any great or lasting effect. The serious dispositions which might be excited by them would die away before a fresh occasion might return to renew and strengthen them. The impressions which are received on this day will hardly last from one Sunday to another: how then would the impression which one alarming incident might produce last till another should happen to renew it?

That

That so many of those who do make some religious use of this day are no better, and that they who do not make such a use of it are no worse than they are, is no proof that the consequences would not be what we have been supposing, if there were no such provision for these purposes. The former, if they make the least use they can make of it; if they only go to church and hear a sermon, receive some benefit from it. They hear some part of their duty, and are reminded of the consequences of their sins: and this must be a check to their evil inclinations, and restrain them from going so far as they otherwise would go. If they are now bad, it is reasonable to suppose they would be much worse, if they were to have no admonitions of their duty; no warnings of the danger of transgressing it. That they are not better, is owing to their not availing themselves of all the advantages which the Sabbath gives them. If, by not attending all the lectures which are provided for their instruction, or by not reading and thinking at home on subjects

that would inform and edify them, they lose the opportunities of improvement which they have; or if, by spending the rest of the day in an improper manner, they efface the good impressions they have received, we cannot wonder if they are not what they ought to be.

And as to those who make no religious use of this day, and yet are not so bad as we have been supposing men would be if they were not to do it, the reason is very obvious. Though they derive no immediate advantage from the institution, they partake of the advantages that are derived by others from it. Its good effects are conveyed, through them, to those who will not embrace themselves the opportunities of improvement that it affords. If it were not for their influence; if there were none to inculcate and countenance virtue, we should see a most unhappy difference. Bad as the world is at present, it would be in a far more lamentable state of sin and ignorance, if there were not some such means

means as the Sabbath has provided to enlighten and improve it, and if there were not some who make use of these means, and convey the advantages they receive themselves to those who do not go to these sources for improvement.

It must be allowed, by every one who looks to the consequences, that it is necessary there should be some times set apart for religious uses: and if it be considered how soon the impressions of religion would be effaced, if they were not frequently renewed, it will be allowed that these times should be frequent. This then is an argument of no small weight to prove the purpose for which the Sabbath was intended.

It is easy to obviate an objection which may here be made, that if it be necessary there should be times set apart for these uses, it is as necessary in one age, and one part of the world as in another. Why then was it so late before such an institution was provided?

and why was it confined to so small a compass
as the Jewish nation?

Whether the Sabbath were instituted at the beginning of the world, or then only when we first read of its being observed, has been a subject of much dispute. No traces* of it being discoverable in Scripture-history till the Israelites came out of Egypt, and no † remains of such a practice being to be found in the customs and manners of any people but the Jews, many have thought that it was then first instituted. But why might it not have been instituted at the time when

* The passage in the history of the creation, (Gen. ii. 3.) they do not understand as a command then given for the sanctification of this day, but as a remark of Moses, when he came to give an account of God's resting on the seventh day, that this was what the Sabbath was a memorial of, and the reason of the institution.

† There were days sacred to the honour of their gods, but these seem rather to be institutions of their own than practices derived from this.

Moses

Moses speaks of it in the history of the creation, and yet among other religious practices have been so defaced in the general corruption of the world, when “all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth*,” as that no remains of it might reach later times? Might it not have been appointed in the time of Moses not as a new command, but the revival of an old one?

But without entering into this question, in which it would be very difficult to determine one way or other, the present objection may be answered by recalling to the reader's mind some other very considerable advantages which God was pleased to give to one age and one part of the world, in preference to another. 'To the Jews he thought proper to reveal himself face to face : the rest of the world were left to trace him out by the contemplation of his works. To them he

* Gen. vi. 12.

pointed out a place and mode of worship : These he left to themselves to discover where and how they were to worship him. To them he gave a written law, and sent prophets to teach, admonish, and reprove them : These he left to the light of reason to discover what their duty was, and to the voice of conscience to reprove them when they should do amiss. Supposing therefore the Sabbath to have been an institution first given to the Jews, and that the rest of the world were left to their reason to discover the necessity of it, it was not we see inconsistent with God's usual dealings with them. He might in this, as he did in other cases, have assisted his peculiar people, while he left others to the light and guidance of their reason to find out what was necessary to be done.

We have seen how necessary it is that there should be times set apart for religious
uses ;

uses : let us now see how exactly the Sabbath seems calculated for the purpose.

Is it necessary that there should be some intermission of our labours to enable us to meet together for the purposes of worship and instruction? The Sabbath is an opportunity exactly calculated for it : it gives us time, whatever our condition, whatever our employment be, to come together to worship God and improve ourselves. — Is it necessary that we should be freed from every worldly care to be disposed and fit for spiritual employments? The Sabbath effectually does it : All worldly employments it expressly prohibits : there is therefore nothing to hinder our religious exercises ; nothing to indispose us ; nothing to clog our minds and prevent the reception of good impressions ; nothing to wear them out when we have received them. — Is it necessary that these opportunities should be frequent? Our Sabbaths are so. One day in seven is appointed
to

to be a day of rest : a time not remote enough to wear out the impression of things spiritual, nor so frequent as not to be consistent with a proper attention to the things that are temporal.

What then could have been more exactly adapted to our necessities than this institution is? — An institution that gives us time for spiritual employments, without interfering with our worldly ones ; that tends to dispose us for such employments, by taking from us the causes of aversion ; that guards against the dangers to which our improvements would be exposed, by not suffering us to return immediately to our business, in the hurry and cares of which we should forget the things we had learnt, and lose the dispositions we should carry with us.

So exactly adapted to our necessities, is it not a confirmation that this was what it was designed for ?

If

* I
prep.

If it were necessary it might now, lastly, be shewn, that this was what the Jews understood the design to be.

Philo, a Jew, who lived in the times of the Apostles, speaking of the fourth commandment, says, "it is a command that they should spend the Sabbath in a pious and holy manner *." In another place, "Moses appointed that they should meet together on the Sabbath day to hear the law; which custom they still continue; some of the priests, if any present, otherwise some of the elders, reading the law, and then expounding it †." And again, "as God rested on the seventh day from the works of creation, Moses commanded that his people should, as in other respects, so also in this, imitate God, by working on the six days, and dedicating the seventh to rest and contemplations on the works of nature; and, moreover, that they should review their past actions, in order to rectify in their future conduct the

* Lib. de Decalog.
præp. l. 8.

† Apud Euseb.

failings

failings they might discover *.”—“ They were not to spend it, like some, in laughter, childish sports, or as the Romans did their feasts; but in the study and contemplation of the works of nature †.” And in his book, *de Mundi Opificio*, he says, they employed the Sabbath in divine philosophy for their moral improvement.

Josephus also says, that their legislator commanded that they should every week, laying aside all business, come together to hear the law, and learn it ||.

And Agatharchides, in the same author, speaking of the Jews, says, that it is their custom to rest on the seventh day, and not to bear arms, or have any other care upon their minds, but to spend the day in their temples §.

* Lib. de Decalog.

† Εν τη επιστημη η θεωρια των περιφυσιν. Lib. 3. de vita Mos.

‡ Εις βελτιωσιν ηθων.

|| Cont. Apion. l. 2.

§ Εν τοις ιεροις εκλετακοτες τας χειρας μεχρι της εσπερας. Apud Joseph. cont. Apion. l. 1.

The

That this was in their time the opinion that was entertained, and the use that was made of the Sabbath, is very plain.

It is as plain that it was then thought that this had been the practice from the time of Moses: that he, however, intended and directed such a use to be made of it.

But little appears in the early times of the Jewish church to inform us how they spent it. The rest which was required was observed with a rigorous strictness, but what they did with their time does not appear.

As to the public worship of God, all nations, on their festivals, paid divine honours of some sort, such as they thought agreeable to the gods they meant to honour; and it is not to be supposed that the Israelites, even if they had had no instructions, nothing but their reason to direct them, did not worship their God after their manner, on the day set apart in honour of him.

In

In respect of instruction, it appears to have been the business of the Priests and Levites to teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord had spoken to them by Moses *. And this not only in respect of sacrifices, purifications, and such like parts of the law, but in moral duties also. “The priest’s lips were to keep knowledge, and the people were to seek the law at his mouth, for he was the messenger of the Lord of Hosts †.” And they seem to have been dispersed among the several tribes, that they might be at hand to advise and instruct them in their duty.

There were places ‡ to which the people were accustomed to resort for the purpose both of worship and instruction : and no day so likely for this as the Sabbath ; a day of universal leisure. This appears to have been a use which they made of this day, from the

* Levit. x. 11. Deuteron. xxxiii. 10. Ezek. xlv. 23, 24.

† Malachi, ii. 7.

‡ Psal. lxxiii. 17. and Psal. lxxiv. 4, 8.

question which the husband of the Shunamite asks her when she was going to the man of God, on account of the death of her son. "Wherefore, says he, wilt thou go to him to-day? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath *?"

Whatever provision there were for the public teaching of the law, it must be allowed that it was at times greatly neglected. For Jehoshaphat King of Judah found it necessary to send Priests and Levites to teach in Judah, who "had the book of the law of the Lord with them, and went about through all the cities of Judah, and taught the people †. And in the reign of Josiah, when the book of the law was found in the house of the Lord, it was received with a surprize that argued them to have been little acquainted with it ‡: unless we suppose it to have been the original copy of the law that they had

* 2 Kings, iv. 23.

† 2 Chron. xvii. 7, 8, 9.

‡ 2 Kings, xxii.

found, and that this was the cause of their admiration.

But their ignorance of the law then, or at any other time, is no more a proof that there had been no public teaching of it originally, or at different times, in the preceding ages, than that Jehoshaphat did not send Priests and Levites through the cities of Judah to teach it; or that it had not been read once in seven years as it was appointed to be *. Nor is the silence of Scripture, as to the weekly reading of the law, any more an argument that it was not done, than its silence in respect of this solemn reading of it every seventh year, on the feast of tabernacles; which was a practice much more solemn and likely to be taken notice of than the common weekly readings of it, and yet was not taken notice of in all that long period to the time of Ezra †; unless, indeed, we think those public readings of it in the times of Joshua ‡ and Josiah ||

* Deuteron. xxxi. 10, 11, &c.

† Nehem. viii. 2, 3. ‡ Josh. viii. 34, 35.

|| 2 Chron. xxxiv. 30, 31.

were

were done in obedience to this command, and were not rather extraordinary practices on extraordinary occasions.

Shamefully neglected and misemployed the Sabbath certainly was at times, it is evident from the frequent reproofs of the prophets; which, if they prove that a religious use was not always made of the Sabbath, prove, however, that this was the use to which it should have been applied.

In our Saviour's time there were synagogues in every town for the people to resort to on the Sabbath. These it was his constant practice to attend *; giving his sanction to the religious and rational observance of the day, while he discountenanced every thing superstitious or unnecessary in their observance of it.

* Luke, iv. 16, &c.

How long these synagogues had been established, cannot with certainty be said. Both them, and the practice of reading the Scriptures in them every Sabbath, are mentioned as very ancient. “Moses, of old time, hath in every city them that preach him, being read^d in the synagogue every Sabbath day *.” The Jews, we have seen, understood it to have been a practice as old as the time of Moses. They thought it to have been his appointment, that the Sabbath should be devoted to this and other religious uses.

We have seen, then, the design, as it related to the Jews.

Now the Christian, though the day is changed from the seventh to the first, is evidently an institution substituted in the place of this, and designed for the same general purposes, however in some particular circumstances they may differ.

* Acts, xv. 21.

There

There were some things in the institution peculiar to the Jews ; but as to the principal design, it is as relative, and as necessary to Christians as to them ; so far as it relates to these it was therefore continued ; as it had respect peculiarly to them it was no longer to be observed.

As a memorial of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, it had no relation to any but themselves. As a sign of the covenant between God and them, it was no longer of any use. As a sign of distinction between them and others, it was now unnecessary. But as a memorial of the creation, it was as relative to the Christian as to the Jew. As a type of their eternal Sabbath, it equally concerned them both. As a day of rest, it was as necessary to one as to the other. As a day to be devoted to religious uses, there was the same necessity, the same reasons for it as there ever were.

Now their deliverance out of Egypt being no longer to be commemorated, and the resurrection of Christ being now the object which Christians were to have respect to, as the great and leading object of their faith, to accommodate the institution to the present state of things, the day was changed from the seventh to the first; the day on which Christ arose from the dead; that, as it was before a memorial of a temporal, it might now commemorate their spiritual deliverance; their restoration from a state of sin and spiritual slavery to a heavenly Canaan, an incorruptible inheritance. Of the creation, it was still as much a memorial as it had ever been; for, though the day was not the same, it was still one day in seven, and therefore equally commemorative of that, while it also commemorated another object more immediately relative to the Christian state,

The design then of our Sabbath, omitting what was peculiar to the Jewish, is, First, that
it

it be a day of ease and refreshment.—Whatever part of the design of theirs this was, it must be still as much a part of the design of ours : for there was no necessity, no reason for such an indulgence, which does not equally extend to us. But how small a part of the design this was, we have already seen. The cessation of their labours appears to have been designed for more important purposes ; but, as these would not be obstructed, but rather promoted by rest, it might have been intended both for this and for the further purposes which it had in view. And so far only can ours be so intended.

It is next intended as a memorial of the creation, and redemption of the world.

It is intended also as a type of our eternal rest.

But it is lastly and principally intended to be devoted to religious uses.—This was what the Jewish Sabbath was principally designed

for; and is, if possible, still more clearly the design of ours. Every reason that has been given in proof of this design, with respect to them, is equally convincing with respect to us. And we have not all those other purposes which they had, that it might else be designed for. There are but these others that can be the design of ours——our ease and indulgence; the remembrance of the creation and redemption of the world; and, the figurative representation of a future state.——As a day of ease and indulgence, the consequences, we have seen, would be too bad to admit this to be any great part of the design: and as a bare memorial it would be of little use. It would be to little purpose to have a day set apart in remembrance that the world was made by God, or redeemed by Christ, or to represent the Sabbath of a future state, unless the mind be directed by it to the objects it has respect to; led by the recollection of them to pious and holy exercises; and possessed with those sentiments and affections which they tend, and were intended

tended to produce. These are the great purposes to which the others are subservient. Rest prepares and disposes us for such employments. Amidst the hurry of business, and the temptations of interest we are not disposed for religious subjects. Clogged with cares, and oppressed with fatigues, we are not fit, if we were disposed, for employments that require such a close and undisturbed application of the mind. Now, the Sabbath, as a day of rest, takes us out of the hurry and temptations of the world, and leads us into a retirement where our minds, composed and undisturbed, may be able to contemplate spiritual objects, and may be fit for spiritual exercises. And, as a memorial, it is subservient to the same design. Rest prepares us ; this leads us to the subjects which should employ our thoughts ; it leads us to those great truths which are, in themselves, proper for our meditations, and which are most likely to lead us on to other exercises in which a religious day should be employed.

It

It may perhaps be thought that there is not now the same necessity that there was for a day to be set apart for religious uses : that if men were what Christianity was designed to make them, they would be, at all times, fit and disposed for such employments.—So they would. But we are not to consider what would be the case if men were what they ought to be, but what is necessary as they are. If we already were what Christians should be, there would be little need of many of the helps and means of virtue that we have. There would be little need of this. But considering what we are, it is not less necessary now than it ever was. Human nature is the same. We have the same passions, the same infirmities, as we ever had. We have only better means to subdue our passions, and to get the better of our infirmities. These must be known and used before they can be effectual : and this is the opportunity to know and use them. They who have possessed themselves of the advantages
which

which the Gospel gives them, and have so subdued their nature that they can at any time attend to their spiritual concerns, are not aware how much they are indebted, for the strength to do it, to the Sabbath. Even with the helps derived from hence, it has been seen how difficult it is to do it; and they will consider what it would be without them.

The time is not yet come when “from
“ one Sabbath to another all flesh shall
“ come to worship before the Lord*.” It is plain it is not; for a day was thought necessary for such purposes, even in the first and purest times of Christianity: and, if it were necessary then, what must it be in succeeding times, when that zeal and sincerity which distinguished the Christians of those days is well nigh exhausted, and there remains little more than the form of godliness among us.

* Isaiah, lxvi. 23.

The practice of the Christian church from its earliest infancy, proves the necessity and the intention of the Sabbath. Indeed in the time of the Apostles but little of it is to be seen. They kept a daily Sabbath. They had a great and important work in hand—— They had to propagate a new religion throughout the world—— to teach and to baptize all nations. “ Daily “ therefore in the temple, and in every house “ they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus “ Christ †.” But yet, this was a day which they more particularly devoted to such uses ‡. They still indeed continued to have some regard to the Jewish Sabbath ||, in compliance with the prejudices of the Jewish converts : but the first day of the week was now what the seventh before had been, divested of all that was peculiar to the Jews.

† Acts v. 42.

‡ Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. Rev. i. 10.

|| Bingham, Orig. Eccles. B. 20. c. 3.

The observation of this day is not often mentioned in the writings of the Apostles ; but in the writings of others who lived near their time, and in all the succeeding ages of the church, it is particularly mentioned and described.

Pliny, an heathen writer, relates, what he had had from Christians, that it was their custom to meet together on a certain day, before it was light, and sing an hymn to Christ, and bind themselves with a sacrament to do no wickedness * : ——— a plain allusion to their religious meetings on this day ; which, through fear of their persecutors, were in the night, or very early in the morning. The sacrament which he speaks of as a part of their service, was a part of the service of every Lord's-day for many ages after.

* Lib. 10. Epist. 97.

The Christian writers * about this time speak of the first or Lord's-day as the day which should be honoured and observed by Christians; and they tell us how †,——in a spiritual manner: that it should not be given up to bodily refreshments or entertainments, but to spiritual studies and contemplations.

It was their usual practice to meet together for the purposes of worship and instruction ‡.

* Barnabas, one of the Apostles speaks of the Sabbath as a day which they kept in honour of the resurrection, *αγομεν την ημεραν την ογδοην εις Ευφροσυνην εν η ο Ιησους ανεστη εκ νεκρων*,——not festive but spiritual joy; for the blessing it had respect to was a spiritual one. Barnab. Epist. S. 11. And Ignatius—*Καλα το σαββαλισαι εορταζετω πας φιλοχειρος την κυριακην, την αναστασιν, την υπατον πασαν των ημερων*. Ep. ad Magnes.

† *Μηκει εν σαββατιζουμεν Ιουδαϊκως, η αργειαις χαιροεις—αλλ' εκασος υμων σαββαλιζετω πνευμαλικως· μελετη νομω χειρων, η σωματι· ανισει· δημιουργια Θεου δαυμαζων*—ibid.

‡ Justin Martyr. Apolog. 2. Dionysius Bp. of Corinth, apud Euseb. lib. iv. c. 23, &c.

Divine

Divine service was not only constantly performed, but they were obliged under severe censures and punishments to attend it*.

And the rest of the day they did not spend in idleness, or luxurious indulgencies; for they condemned the Jews for doing so. And St. Chrysostom exhorts his hearers to devote it wholly to religious meditations, and not defeat by the manner of spending the rest of the day the good design of those exercises in which they had employed a part†. St. Austin too exhorts his audience to the same effect ‖.

As to public diversions, laws were made to prohibit them, and the reason given for the prohibition was, that the minds of Christians

* Bingham's Origines Ecclesiast. B. xx. c. 2.

† Hom. 5. in Matth. & Hom. de Eleemosyn. Tom. 4.

‖ Tractat. 7. in Johann.

might not be interrupted, but be wholly employed in the service of God §.

It would be to little purpose to trace the usage of the Christian church through the several succeeding ages of it—to recite the laws which have from time to time been made for the religious observance of this day. It is sufficient that these were the sentiments, and this the practice of the first and purest ages of it; who were best able to judge of its design and use.

There have indeed been times in the Christian, as there were in the Jewish church, when its design has been strangely forgotten, and grossly perverted. In this country public diversions have been allowed on this day by royal authority †. And in the church of Rome the same tempting indulgence is still continued. From motives of policy or com-

§ Bingham Origin. Ecclesiast. B. xx. c. 2.

† Book of Sports, James I. Anno 1618. and Charles I. Anno 1633.

pliance with the disposition of the times, the Sabbath hath in different ages and places been often suffered to be shamefully perverted.

But though corrupt individuals and corrupt ages have been too well satisfied with the rest and indulgence which it gave them to look for any farther object, more considerate ages, and some good men, no doubt, in every age, have discovered its design to be what it is.

But whatever might have been the opinion or practice of the church in different ages or countries; however the design of the institution might have been overlooked, mistaken, or abused, the intention of it would be still the same. A serious, unprejudiced enquiry would have informed them, as it informs us, that it was designed for religious uses. This has appeared from a variety of arguments: more perhaps than may be thought necessary. But though less might have been sufficient to sa-

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tisfy

tisfy some, others may stand in need of all the arguments that have been used. And it is quite necessary that they should know the design, to observe it properly. For want of knowing this it is superstitiously observed by some ; grossly abused by others ; and too little employed by all as such a day ought to be employed. By attending to the design we shall see what are proper employments, and what are not : and we shall see why they are so.

This is what we were next to consider ; — how the Sabbath should be observed, to answer the purposes for which it was designed.

Its inferior purposes will be answered while our attention is directed to the more important objects which it has in view. So far as our ease and refreshment be any part of the design, this is answered by making it a day of rest. The manner in which this rest is to be employed to answer the further purposes of the
infti-

institution, would not interfere with this, if it were a much greater part of the design than it appears to be: and, as a memorial, such an employment of it will best answer the design. Our enquiry will therefore be, how we should employ the day to answer the more important purposes for which it was designed: what employments are contrary, and what suitable to this part of the design.

To make it a day of pleasure must directly counteract, and merely a day of rest can little answer such a design. It was given us for religious uses. We are to abstain from business, because business would obstruct us; would indispose us; would clog our minds that we should be unfit for religious exercises, and should not be benefited, if we were disposed for such employments. If we only then refrain from business, we are as far as ever from the object to which the Sabbath was intended to bring us. Rest is no-

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thing

thing more than the means. The religious employment of our time is what this rest was designed for. To little purpose do we rest, unless we employ the leisure that it gives us to the honour of God, and the improvement of ourselves. It is in this as it is in other religious ordinances, the means without the end are of little value. If our cessation from business be nothing more than mere cessation; if it be not done with a view to some further end, and directed to its proper end, it is a needless, a ridiculous ceremony. Better would it be to employ our time to some useful purposes: in employments that would afford us some advantage, and give us greater pleasure than we have in sitting still.

And if it be so little answerable to the design to make it merely a day of leisure, what must it be to make a day of pleasure of it? If we do this, we not only fall short of the design, but directly counteract it. The
reason

reason on which the institution is founded is, that we may have nothing to interrupt or indispose us in religious matters. And to spend the day in pleasure, must as effectually interrupt and indispose us as any business could do. Far better would it be to employ it in a useful manner, than spend it so. We should then indeed transgress the command, but we should not more effectually defeat its intention. We do not now comply with the command. We should then but do the same; and should be employed in a manner much more useful, and not so sinful. The industrious employment of our talents is laudable in itself, and sinful only when it takes up time which might be employed to better purposes. It is sinful on this day, on this account. It is prohibited because it would obstruct the more important business for which the day is set apart. Idleness is always sinful, and pleasure such an inlet into sin, that we had much better employ the day in business than

consume it in pleasures tending to obliterate the little knowledge which we have, to choke the few remaining seeds of virtue, and render our dispositions, already too corrupt, still more corrupted than they are.

We scruple to do any work on this day, but we may be assured that work is not a greater profanation of the Sabbath than idleness or pleasure. If we waste it in idleness, we come short of its design; if we consume it in pleasure, we entirely defeat it.

This is a consideration which is recommended to the serious attention of those who make no religious use at all of this day. And as to them who do spend some little of it in a religious manner, the rest in pleasure; though they make a better use of it than if they were to spend it all in the same unprofitable manner, yet how far do they fall short of the design; how greatly do they obstruct the good purposes of the institution? If to acquire religious knowledge, and cultivate

vate virtuous dispositions, be any part of the design, and they only go to church, and devote the long remainder of the day to pleasure, how little do they answer this design? If they go but once in the day to church, as is but too much the fashion with those in higher life, they lose, in many places, half the opportunities of improvement that are provided for them; opportunities full as valuable and as necessary as those which they do make use of: and if they embrace all these public advantages, they lose, however, some very valuable private ones. They lose the opportunity of reading and meditating at home upon subjects that would inform and edify them; of thinking over past actions, and preparing to withstand future temptations. These advantages, which the Sabbath was designed to give them, they lose by employing so little of it in a religious manner; and the advantages which they do acquire from that little of it which they so employ, they lose by the manner in which they spend the rest. The entertainments, the company, and the

conversation to which they have recourse to pass away the day, soon lull the awakened mind to sleep, wipe out every good impression, and stifle every serious purpose. However affected by the reasonings and persuasions which they heard in the morning, they are all effaced and forgotten in the evening. This then cannot answer the design of the Sabbath. For to what purpose do they receive an impression which a few hours will entirely efface? To what purpose do they form resolutions, which are no sooner formed than forgotten? We are called off from business, that we may not have any thing to obstruct us in our religious exercises, or to prevent their good effects. And thus to employ our time not only obstructs us in many very necessary exercises of religion, but full as effectually prevents the good effects of those in which we have employed ourselves as any business could do. Business could but take off our thoughts from the objects to which they have been directed, and obliterate the things with which our minds have been impressed;

impressed ; and this is effectually done by the company, the conversation, and the amusements in which we spend the remainder of the day.

It is quite necessary that we advert to the design, to see what are fit employments or amusements on the Sabbath, and what are not. For want of considering this, many which are very unsuitable are thought innocent ; and some not more unsuitable highly offensive.

Playing at cards is not a greater profanation of the day than many other common recreations which are used, without a scruple, by those who are very scrupulous with respect to this. It is a sinful indulgence on this day. It is a sad misemployment of the Sabbath. But why is it so ? Because it is in itself a sin ? — The excesses of almost every indulgence, however innocent in themselves, are sinful. There are ill effects which arise from this as from every other in excess. If it engages much of our time, which is too precious to be

be lavishly squandered in any pleasures ; if it wastes our substance, ruffles our tempers, agitates and inflames our passions, it is, without a doubt, sinful at any time. But, setting aside the excesses of it, it is as innocent perhaps as most of our amusements are.

Is it then because it is a bad example to the lower class of men, that it is at this time sinful ? This is what is thought by many ; and this alone keeps them from it. But if this be all the reason why they should not do it, they need not lay so hard a restraint upon themselves. For what bad example would they set ? If it be not sinful in themselves, how is it so in those beneath them ? If allowable in them, why should their servants and their inferiors be deprived of such a pleasure ? They, indeed, may not have so much time on other days for religious uses as their masters or superiors have, but it is to be feared that time which their masters and superiors have on other days is devoted to other uses than religious ones ; and that they therefore stand in no less need of discipline on this than any of

of their inferiors do. The example, we allow, is bad: but first, the practice in itself is so. To lead others into sin would, no doubt, be an aggravation of their own: but their own is bad enough to deter them from such a practice.

But why is a practice, innocent enough at other times, sinful at this? Recollect why the industrious employment of our talents to useful purposes is sinful on this day, though innocent, though laudable at other times. This is so on the same account. It takes up time which should be otherwise employed, and effaces impressions which ought to be preserved and strengthened. The card-table cannot improve our knowledge, or our dispositions. It may divert away the knowledge we have gained, and stifle the dispositions that have been excited in us. We can there have no opportunity for reflection; no conversation on subjects tending to inform or improve the mind. We are therefore not pursuing the object which the Sabbath has in view,

view, but on the contrary, we are losing our time; losing the good effects which a sermon might otherwise have produced; and indisposing ourselves for the exercises which ought to follow. Judge then whether this be a fit amusement for the Sabbath: and observe the reason why it is not.

So much is said with respect to this, because it is of late become a very common Sunday's amusement among the great and fashionable part of the world: and because it is looked upon, by those who are not so fashionable, with a peculiar horror, as if it were the only one they need deny themselves. Those are entreated to consider that it is not so innocent as they have been used to think it: and these, to observe the reason why it is not. By attending to the reason, they will see that there are many others, not less improper, and some that are more so.

It is equally improper, they will see, because equally a loss of time, a diversion of those thoughts

thoughts which our religious exercises have excited, and a cause of indisposition with respect to the remaining exercises of the day, to idle away the time in company where no conversation is suffered to arise that can at all improve the knowledge we have gained, or cultivate the dispositions that have been excited in us; but on the contrary, conversation on the most trifling subjects that can be thought of; subjects, perhaps, that have a direct tendency to draw off our affections from things above; obliterate the good impressions we have received, and attach us more and more to the world, and the vices of it.

And if this be inconsistent with the design, what shall we say to the more joyous manner in which we see it spent? Will there be any room for reflection? Will any conversation on subjects of a religious nature be suffered to intrude and damp the pleasures of the festive table? Will they be disposed, will they be fit for reflection, devotion, or any other religious exercise, when they have pampered their appetites, and stupified their senses?

senses? Such entertainments, such company, and such conversation as theirs, surely, cannot improve their knowledge or their dispositions, but must greatly injure both. The impressions which they receive at church must be entirely effaced, and others of an opposite nature be imprinted in their place. The dispositions they bring with them must be stifled, and dispositions quite contrary produced by so improper an employment of their time. To little purpose do they go to church, if they so employ the remainder of the day; as well might they spend it all in the same unprofitable manner. They could not well defeat the design more effectually than they do.

By attending to the design it will be seen, that whatever tends to unfit or indispose us for the exercises which are suitable to the day; to obliterate the knowledge which we have, or prevent us from acquiring more; to check the dispositions that have been excited in us, or hinder the improvement of them; every such amusement or employment is inconsistent

consistent with the intention of the Sabbath, because it frustrates the end which it has in view.

And by thus attending to the design, it will be seen that the indulgences which are at all improper on this day are improper at all times of the day;—that we may not, as catholic countries do, and from their example many here would wish to do, after such a time indulge in any pleasures that we please. Every pleasure and every employment that has a tendency to obstruct the purposes of the day is unallowable, and unfit at any time of the day. Whether earlier or later, is of little consequence. They who begin in the earlier part of the day can but wipe out all that they have heard or read: and this they do who close the day in such a manner.

If we would spend the Sabbath answerably to its design, we must consider it as a day devoted to religious uses. As the first and great purpose for which it was designed, religion should

should be the first and great business of the day. Every opportunity of public worship and instruction we should certainly embrace. The intermediate parts of the day we should employ in recollecting, digesting, and applying what we have heard; in reading the Scriptures, and other edifying books; in private prayer and meditation; in reviewing the actions of the past week, and forming resolutions, and cultivating dispositions to do better in the week to come.

These, and such like exercises, have a tendency to improve the mind, and therefore, to promote the end which the institution has in view. It is not necessary that these should engage all our time, and that we should do nothing but think and talk of religion all the day. There will be time for relaxation, and that time may be spent in such a manner as not to counteract the purposes to which we have applied the rest. The employments we have been speaking of are not laborious: they are

are easy and not unpleasant ones. Whatever part of the design the rest and refreshment of the body be, they do not at all obstruct that purpose. The body is refreshed; while the mind is employed. But there is time enough for the salutary exercises that our health or close confinement to business on other days may require, and our religious exercises too. And as to amusements, there are many that will not at all be hurtful to the acquisitions we have made. The book of nature will furnish us with ample matter for our amusement. The minutest parts of the creation are subjects that will employ our minds to great advantage, and with equal pleasure. A rational mind can be at no loss for entertainment amidst the vast variety of subjects that he has to make his choice of. If he has not time on other days to read, what can be a better or more agreeable amusement than this *? How many subjects

* Would it not be a very proper employment of the leisure which the Sabbath gives them, if
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jects are there, though not professedly of a religious nature, that will entertain, while they improve, the mind? Indeed it is a mark of sad depravity when we cannot relish religious ones. There must be something wrong in our dispositions, when it is a pain, and not a pleasure to us, to meditate on these; when we cannot, without reluctance, devote one day in seven to religious

they who cannot read were to learn to do it? In the acquisition of this valuable art, they would be pursuing the end which the institution has in view. They would be laying the foundation of much satisfaction and many advantages. If they were able to read the Scriptures, they would be able to spend their Sabbath not only more consistently with its design, and with more advantage to themselves, but more to their satisfaction too than in a dull tedious vacuity of employment. However it may be at other times, none can complain that they have not now an opportunity to learn. They have time that they know not what to do with. To what wretched expedients do they have recourse to kill the long lived day! and how heavily does it hang on those who have not some opportunities of indulgence and relief!

subjects

subjects or employments, and that a day so peculiarly fitted for the purpose. But however, if such our dispositions be; if we cannot find amusement in religious ones, there are others that are innocent; many that are innocent and improving too, in which we may spend the time we have to spare. We have only to be careful not to employ more of it on such subjects, or in such amusements, than shall be consistent with a due attention to subjects and employments more important and peculiar to the day; nor on any that shall tend to corrupt or alienate the mind from these, or in any wise obstruct the good effects which these would be productive of.

Social intercourse may be very proper under some restrictions; but it is an indulgence that must be used with caution. If we spend that time in company which our own or the wants of our families require for religious uses; or if we spend it in such company, or

such a manner, as may draw off our minds from the objects to which they have been directed, and destroy the dispositions we have cultivated, we frustrate the intention of the day. But when we have made a proper use of all the public and private opportunities of improvement we have had, if we can relish serious company and rational conversation, it will not be inconsistent with the design of the day to enjoy the society of our friends; nay, it would be carrying on this design if we could relish subjects of a religious nature; which, however disagreeable at other times, would surely not be so at this. On a day like this, when our minds are prepared for such subjects; when they have been led into a religious train of thinking, they would be perfectly seasonable; and, one would think, not less entertaining than any other subject of conversation. They would, however, be conducive to the end for which the Sabbath was designed; and, as they are not the subjects of conversation at any other time, would very properly be so at this.

Not

Not that every other subject would profane the day : there are many others that may be very safely the subjects of a Sunday's conversation. We have only to be careful that they are of such a nature as will not be hurtful to our religious acquisitions.

But as to this and every other indulgence, it will depend upon the wants and necessities of men. It is impossible to point out to every one every indulgence which would be improper, or to prescribe to every one every employment that is necessary. Each must consider well what his necessities and what his dispositions are; and must judge for himself how much of his time it is necessary to employ in the exercises for which the day is set apart; and how he may spend the rest, so as not to frustrate the good effects of these. By keeping the design in view, he will know how to dispose of his time in the manner that will best answer the intention of it : he will be directed to devote to his religious improvement whatever shall be necessary to

give him a thorough knowledge of his duty, and dispositions to perform it; and not to indulge in any pleasures or amusements that shall have a tendency to injure the acquisitions he has made.

Thus should the Sabbath be observed, if the design be what it has appeared to be.— And if this were not its design; if it were left to ourselves to make the use which we should think proper of it, is not such an employment of it in all respects so conducive, and in many so necessary to our spiritual good, that we should be very imprudent if we were not to employ it so?

It is very reasonable, it is necessary, they say, after the cares and confinement of the six preceding days, that this should be a day of relaxation. But is it not as reasonable and as necessary that there should be a time for the refreshment and the care of the soul? And what time so proper as this, when all temporal cares are laid aside, and they have nothing

thing to prevent or interrupt their spiritual ones?

Bodily rest and refreshment, it has been observed, are not inconsistent with spiritual employments. The body is refreshed, while the mind is employed. But what if it were not? Which is of most concern—the rest of the body, or the care of the soul? What if they were so worn out with fatigue as really to stand in need of all the relaxation they contend for? Do their souls want no refreshment? Do they want no care? The greater their confinement to temporal affairs has been, the less can they have attended to their spiritual; the greater therefore must be their spiritual wants. And would they suffer these to give way to their bodily ones? Would they not consider, that by not allowing themselves the rest and indulgence which they might stand in need of, they could only impair their health, deprive themselves of a little pleasure, and, at worst, cut off a few years from the length of life; but that by not attending to their spiritual wants, they would

impair the health of their souls, and deprive themselves of everlasting life? And would they not therefore think it prudent to devote this day to their spiritual affairs? No other part of their time being so suitable, no other being set apart for such uses, would they not think this a happy opportunity for it?

Whatever is necessary, or whatever will conduce to our spiritual good, is certainly to be preferred to every thing that may tend, or may be necessary to our temporal. And such an employment of the Sabbath is in every respect conducive, and in some quite necessary, to our spiritual improvement.

Nothing can be better calculated to keep up a sense of religion in our minds than the dedication of some part of our time to religious uses: no opportunity can be more proper for such a purpose than this: nor can there perhaps be any means more conducive to this end than the exercises that have been pointed out.

It

It has appeared that it is not only conducive, but necessary to our spiritual improvement, that there should be some time set apart for such uses; that we should not have time, that we should not be disposed or fit for such employments on days of business. And if it be necessary there should be such a time, this is it: this is the only day we have, free from the interruptions and the cares of business, for religious uses.

What opportunity have we but this to meet our fellow-creatures, and unite in the solemn worship of our God? However it might be our inclination, and our business might permit us at other times to do it, this is, in most places, the only day on which there is any service: and where there are other times of worship, we should not find more to join with us in our devotions than a moderate family would be able to assemble at home: a congregation very inadequate to the solemnity of public worship! But however
adequate,

adequate, or however convenient it might be, are we disposed to do it? Never certainly can it be more convenient, never can we be more likely to be so disposed than when business is at a stand; when we have nothing else to employ our time; when we cannot spend it to any profitable account; and when we are debarred from the pleasures which we have to pass away our time on other days,

What other opportunity of instruction have we than this, which the Sabbath gives us? And this is certainly a profitable, if it be not a necessary means of improvement. “Confider the clergy as so many philosophers, the churches as schools, and their sermons as lectures for the information and improvement of the audience. How would the heart of Socrates or Tully have rejoiced, had they lived in a nation where the law had made provision for philosophers to read lectures of morality and theology every seventh day, in several thousands of schools erected at the public charge throughout

“ throughout the whole country ; at which
 “ lectures all ranks and sexes without dis-
 “ tinction were obliged to be present for
 “ their general improvement *.”

They who think they need no information are imprudent if they do not put themselves in the way to be at least reminded of their duty. In a case of so much consequence one would lose no opportunity of improvement. If they think it impossible to tell them their duty better than they know it, it is worth their while to hear however what the dispenser of the word may have to say. They may possibly have overlooked some things which they are much concerned to know, or not sufficiently have attended to others of great importance : or if in the knowledge of their duty they need no assistance, in the knowledge of themselves they may stand in need of much. Thoroughly as they may think they have searched their hearts, it is possible some wrong propensity may have escaped their notice ; and the closer,

* Guardian, No. 130.

the more impartial search of the preacher may find it out. Perfect as they may think themselves, there may be some latent corruption, some undiscovered vice, some defective virtue, which it is their interest to know. Whatever may be their case, there are too many who notoriously are not in knowledge or in practice what they ought to be. They surely should not neglect so valuable an opportunity of improvement. By constantly attending these public lectures they would know, and could hardly fail in time to be persuaded to the practice of their duty. The duties, the admonitions, and incitements which they should at one time be indisposed to hear, or should hear with unconcern and treat with levity, might find them at another in a state of mind too serious to withstand them. They would sometimes go home convinced of some neglected duty, or resolved to forsake some favourite sin. They would however carry home in their minds the seeds of amendment, which would, one time or other, produce their fruits. The recollection

lection of their duty would be a check to their inclinations, and at length perhaps effect a change in their dispositions. In their case the public dispensation of the word must be a very valuable opportunity of improvement. In the case of many it is their only one. It is from hence only that they can derive the knowledge of their religious duty. Unable to read the Scriptures, whither can they go for instruction but to the pulpit? And if this be their only opportunity, the Sabbath is the only day they have it: it is, they will remember, almost every where the only day that there is any preaching. It is therefore, with respect to them, not a matter of little moment, but of the utmost consequence, whether they go to church or not. And as to those who can read the Scriptures themselves, though it be true, as they are always ready to answer, that they can read them at home as profitably as they should hear the portions that are appointed to be read at church; and that they can read

as instructive and improving sermons as they should hear; yet if they do not do it, it is as necessary that they should go to church as if they could not; they must else be alike ignorant of the things which they are above all others concerned to know, the things belonging to their peace.

The private exercises that have been pointed out it is so much our interest to make the employment of this day, that, whether it were or were not designed for such purposes, we should be imprudent if we were not to do it.

The blessings we have received are so great, and our wants and dependencies both temporal and spiritual so many, that it should be a pleasure to us to have so good an opportunity to retire into our closets, and offer up our prayers and praises to the Being who hath preserved us in times past, and on whom we depend for our future support.

Retrospection

Retrospection and meditation are, too, exercises that have so evident a tendency to our improvement, that they would be fit employments for the Sabbath, whatever its design might be. He who should make it his constant practice every Sunday to review the actions of the past week, to recall to mind all his omissions and transgressions, and all the causes and occasions of them, would take, without dispute, a likely method to know his spiritual state, and to amend it. Such a review would humble and prepare him for the forgiveness of his past offences, and suggest the means and motives that would enable him to avoid the like in future. The experience of the past week would furnish many useful observations for the week to come. By seeing what it was that led him into such a sin, he would be cautioned to guard against a like temptation, and avoid a like surprise in future. By knowing his strength he would know when to retreat, and when he might with safety encounter his adversary :

how far he might go in some pursuits and pleasures, and which it would be unsafe to venture in at all. And are not these advantages worth embracing? Necessary it is not said such a disposition of our time on this day is, because it is not meant to exclude the more immediate inspection which it is our duty, our interest, and ought to be our practice every night to make; and if that be done there will not be so much need of this. Some advantage may however be derived, even then, from so salutary a practice; and where this is not the case, a very material one. It is then a necessary employment: necessary in itself, and, not the employment of any other day, necessary on this.

From religious meditation the advantages to be derived are so materially interesting, that it is very proper we should devote some little of our time to this purpose. And when we consider that there is perhaps no other part of it that we do so employ; that our minds, at other times are too much engaged, and too gross
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and heavy for spiritual meditations, we shall think it more than prudent to make this a part of our Sunday's employment.

Reading the Scriptures must be allowed to be at least a beneficial employment. If they contain all that God hath thought proper to reveal to man; the interesting account of our creation, fall, and redemption, our duty in this life, and our expectations in the next, it must be worth our while sometimes to peruse them; and, if we ever do it, this must be the time: other subjects will engross the leisure of other days: the Bible will at no time relish so well as now. It may, perhaps, be thought sufficient to hear these things from the pulpit: but as it is prudent in those who read the Scriptures to be hearers too, so is it in those who hear these weekly lectures to read the Scriptures also. Let the dispensers of the word represent the doctrines and duties of religion in the clearest and fairest manner; let them ever so skilfully apply the motives and incitements to the practice of it, it will be
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right, after the example of the Berean converts, the hearers of an inspired preacher, to search the Scriptures, whether these things be so *. It is possible they may err themselves, or they may not teach and explain those things which we most want to know at those times when we stand most in need of information. With all their attention to the capacities, the opinions, and dispositions of their hearers, it is impossible that they can adapt their discourses to the necessities of all at one time. While they are instructing and exhorting some, others will stand in need of information and persuasion in another point of duty. Besides, there are many things in Scripture not perhaps necessary to salvation, and therefore not noticed from the pulpit, which yet are very interesting, and proper to be known. The smallest circumstance that relates to so interesting a concern as this we should wish to be acquainted with, though there were no real benefit to be derived from

* Acts, xvii. 11.

the knowledge of it. But much useful information, many very valuable advantages would be derived from a frequent perusal of the Scriptures. Whatever the advantages be; in whatever respect, or whatever degree, it would conduce to our improvement, it is worth our while to do it: it will be of service to our souls, which is of far more material concern than the little gratifications of bodily wants or wishes. These, compared with our spiritual ones, would be of little consequence, if they were of all the consequence that we are apt to think them: so that, whatever the design of the Sabbath be, this and the others that have been mentioned are proper employments for it; because it is highly proper, it is absolutely necessary that we should sometimes so employ ourselves; and there is no other opportunity so convenient or so proper as this: no other part of our time that we are disposed, or that we are able to do it. Considering the attention that we ought to pay to the interests of a future life, above every possible object of our concern in this, and that there is

no time so proper, none, however, that we do devote to such purposes, could we neglect this opportunity without the greatest imprudence, and the greatest disadvantage to ourselves?

We have now seen the design of the institution; and we have seen the reasons why it was so designed; we have seen the uses to which it should be applied, and the necessity of so applying it. The religious observance of the Sabbath has appeared to be no unnecessary or unreasonable custom—no remnant of superstition or fanaticism, but a very serious, rational, and well-grounded practice; designed by the institution, and therefore designed because conducive to our own advantage.

The reader will consider this, and remember, that if he does not make a religious use of the leisure it gives him, he does not only disobey the will, and frustrate the gracious intention of its Author, but he loses advantages

tages of the utmost consequence to himself. He loses the only opportunity that he has for the care of his soul: an opportunity that he cannot lose without the greatest injury to himself.

He has seen how conducive and how necessary to his interest the right employment of the Sabbath is. He will have observed how valuable an advantage he would derive from each of the exercises that have been mentioned, and from the neglect of each how considerable a loss. But if all were to be practised, or all were to be neglected, the consequences, he will consider, would be proportionably greater, and in a degree the more extensive as the practice or neglect should be more universal.

It is a hackneyed, but it is a very just imputation of the grosser degrees of vice to the neglect of the Sabbath. Without looking for any further cause, they may very justly be referred, and easily traced, to the neglect
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of this ordinance, which God has been pleased to appoint as the means of our amendment. On the opportunities which this affords us depend the knowledge of our duty, and our disposition to do it. Not only the hardened sinner, who too late laments the neglect of those opportunities which would have saved him from his untimely end, but every other professor of our religion, whose practice is inconsistent with his profession, would lead a very different life, if he were constantly to embrace the opportunities of improvement which the Sabbath gives him. He would know his duty: he would be convinced of his sins: he would become sensible of the danger of them: he would be persuaded, by the frequent incitements he would read and hear, to pursue the interests of a future state: and he would be enabled, by the discipline of his passions and inclinations, to persevere in a pursuit so materially interesting to him. But if he neglects these valuable opportunities: if he seldom or never goes to church; reads nothing that can give him any knowledge of his duty,

duty, or any sense of his sins; allows himself no time to consider whither his pursuits will lead him; but on the contrary, squanders away the only time he has for such important purposes; spends his Sabbath as he spends his other time, in the indulgence of sinful dispositions; losing ground, instead of advancing in virtue; still more corrupting instead of improving his morals; can he live the life a Christian ought to lead? Can he practise, or can he know, the things belonging to his peace? Must he not be ignorant and insensible of many things which he is much concerned to know? And will he not, for want of knowing what his duty, and what his interest is, and for want of some one to warn and to advise him, run into vice and ruin without a care or thought about the consequences.

Happy for him there are some who do make use of these advantages; in his intercourse with whom his principles and practices are somewhat corrected and improved, and he is there-

therefore not so bad as he would be, if there were nothing to restrain and influence him ; though bad enough he is, far from what he ought to be, and must be, to have any hope beyond the present life.

These things the reader is entreated to consider with all the attention that a matter of so much consequence requires. When he considers seriously how much depends upon the right employment of the Sabbath, he will, I trust, be persuaded to set a higher value, and make a better use of so wise and good an institution. Happy will it be for him if he shall. Happy shall I think myself, if my poor, but well meant, endeavours, shall, in any measure, have contributed to his doing so : if I shall have given him a better opinion than he had of the design and importance of it, and shall have persuaded him to make that use of it which he must make if he has any regard to the design, or the least regard for himself.

F I N I S.



